

Who Was Joshua?

by

Joelee Chamberlain

Who was Joshua? What do we know about him? Well, the Bible tells us quite a few things about Joshua, doesn't it? The Bible tells us that Joshua was a man from the tribe of Ephraim. And that Joshua's father was a man named Nun. In fact, the Bible often calls Joshua, "Joshua the son of Nun". "The son of Nun" was sort of his last name; we might now-a-days say, "Joshua Nunson"! The Bible also tells us that Joshua was a general. It tells us that Joshua was a friend and servant of Moses. And that Joshua was a good spy. And it tells us that after Moses died, Joshua became the leader of the children of Israel, leading them into the promised land of Canaan. In fact, we've talked some before about Joshua, haven't we? Especially when we talked about the book of Joshua. But I thought today we'd look at the life of Joshua himself. Would you like that? All right.

The very first time that we hear about Joshua the son of Nun is in the second book of the Bible, the book of Exodus. The children of Israel (also called the Hebrews and what we today call the Jews) had left Egypt where they had been slaves. Moses was leading them, guided by the Lord Himself in a pillar of cloud in the daytime and a pillar of fire in the nighttime. (I've talked about Moses quite a bit before, haven't I?) There were lots of the children of Israel, 2-3 million people, plus all of their herds of animals!

Now, why am I calling all of these men and women and their children, all the children of Israel? Of course, that just means that Israel was the ancestor of all of them, that they were the great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren of Israel. But who was Israel, do you remember? Yes, Israel was Jacob's other name, wasn't it? Jacob was the son of Isaac, and Isaac was the son of Abraham. Right? So all of these Hebrews were descendants, "children", of Jacob, of Israel, weren't they? But let's go on.

Well, after leaving Egypt, the children of Israel were travelling through the wilderness, and as they went along, probably most of them were walking. And some of the people got tired and were at the end of the line. And then some very bad people called the Amalekites started attacking these weaker people! So Moses said to Joshua, "You choose men and go out and fight with the Amalekites tomorrow!"

So Joshua chose some men to fight. And since Joshua would be leading this army, we might call him a general, mightn't we? And Joshua and his army went out and fought the bad Amalekites. And Moses stood on top of the hill with his hands up, holding his rod that God let him do miracles with. But when Moses' arms got tired, the Amalekites would start to win. So Aaron and Hur had Moses sit on a rock, and they each held up one of Moses' arms while Joshua and his men fought the bad Amalekites. And they fought all day long! Do you remember who won? Yes, God let Joshua and his army beat the Amalakites!

The next time we hear about Joshua is just a little later when the Hebrews were camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. The Lord had come down on top of the mountain, and there were thunderings and lightnings and smoke on top of the mountain, and the Lord gave the people the Ten Commandments.

Then the Lord called Moses to come up on the mountain with Him. Now, Joshua was a special servant to Moses, and Joshua went part way up the mountain with Moses. And it sounds to me as if Joshua stayed there, part way up on the mountain, the whole time, 40 days and nights, that Moses was up on the top of the mountain with the Lord. Joshua was a faithful servant to Moses, wasn't he?

Well, at the end of the 40 days and nights, Moses came down from the mountain with the 2 tables of stone that the Lord had written the Ten Commandments on, and Moses met Joshua. As they got near the camp, they heard a lot of noise. Joshua said, "It sounds like the noise of war in the camp!"

But Moses knew better. Moses said, "No, it doesn't sound like fighting; it's singing that I hear."

Then do you remember what Joshua and Moses saw as they got near the camp? Yes. They saw the idol of the golden calf that Aaron had made! And they saw the people dancing and singing and worshipping this idol! And Moses was so mad that he threw down the 2 tables of stone and broke them! You remember that story from when I've told it to you before, don't you?

Well, after that Moses set up a tent outside the camp. It was called the tabernacle of the congregation. That means the tent of all of the children of Israel. And there sometimes Moses would go into this tent, and the Lord would talk with Moses. Then Moses would go out of the tent and go back into the camp. But Joshua stayed in this tent.

The next time we hear about Joshua is in the fourth book of the Bible, the book of Numbers. By this time the big, beautiful Tabernacle of the Lord had been built and was in the middle of the camp. (I've told you about this big Tabernacle before, haven't I? In fact, we pretended that we visited the camp and saw the Tabernacle, didn't we? Oh, and this beautiful Tabernacle is a different tent than the tabernacle of the congregation that Joshua had stayed in outside of the camp.)

Now, remember, all of this time the Lord was feeding the children of Israel with manna, and He took care of them in the wilderness as they were traveling across the desert on toward the good land of Canaan that the Lord had promised them. But sometimes the children of Israel would complain and be mad at Moses. This was very hard for Moses, and Moses told the Lord how discouraged he was. So the Lord told him to chose 70 wise, older men to help him and that they should gather around the big Tabernacle. And then the Lord came down in a cloud and spoke to Moses. And the Lord gave the 70 elders the Holy Spirit. And what do you think the elders did then? Why, they began prophesying! I'm not sure just what this prophesying was, but it was something special.

However, two men who were in the camp began to prophesy, too. And a young man ran to Moses and told Moses that these 2 men were in the camp prophesying. Well, Joshua heard this. And Joshua said to Moses, "Make them stop, sir!" I'm not sure why Joshua wanted them to stop prophesying, but for some reason it bothered him.

But Moses said to Joshua, "Are you jealous for me? Why, I wish all of the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them!"

Well, after that finally the children of Israel reached near the promised land of Canaan. It was probably about 2 years after they had left Egypt. Anyway, the Lord said to Moses, "Choose 12 important men, one from each tribe. Have them go look at the land, spy it out, and see what it is like." Then these men were to come back and give a report.

So Moses chose one important man from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah, Moses chose Caleb. (I've told you about Caleb before, haven't I?) And from the tribe of Ephraim, Moses chose Joshua the son of Nun. And these 12 men went into the land of Canaan to spy out the land, to see what it was like. Joshua and Caleb and the other 10 men looked all over the land for 40 days.

At the end of the 40 days Joshua and the other 11 men came back. And they brought with them some of the wonderful fruit from the land. Then Joshua and the other 11 men came to Moses and Aaron and all of the people and said to them, "We did what you told us to do. The land is a land that flows with milk and honey." Now, of course, they didn't mean that milk and honey were all over the ground! They meant that it had good soil and that there was good food growing there. And then they said, "And here is some of the fruit from it." And they showed the fruit (grapes and pomegranates and figs) that they'd brought back with them. And the bunch of grapes was so big that they'd carried just one bunch of them on a carrying pole! Wow! That would really be good land for growing food, wouldn't it?!

But then 10 of the men said, "But the people who live there are very strong, and they have walls around their cities! And there are also giants there!"

The people got very upset when they heard this. Very, very tall men?! Oh, dear! But Joshua and Caleb thought differently than the 10 other men. So Caleb quieted the people down by saying, "Let's go up at once and take the land. We can easily do that."

Now, you may be wondering why they would say to go take this good land away from the people who already lived there. Well, to start with, several hundred years earlier the Lord had promised this land of Canaan to Abraham and then to Isaac and then to Jacob. Of course, the Hebrews were the descendants, the great-great-grandchildren of these men, so the land was promised to them, and the Lord always keeps His promises, doesn't He?

But what about the people who lived there now? Well, the people who lived there at that time were very, very wicked people. In fact, the Amalekites who'd attacked them lived in part of the land of Canaan. These wicked people all worshipped idols and would kill people as part of their worship. Can you imagine that?! And they did other very wicked things, too. And the Lord was going to punish these wicked people by taking this good land away from them and giving it to the children of Israel.

Well, after Caleb said they should go in and take the land right away, the 10 other men spoke up again. They said, "We can't fight against these people! They're stronger than we are! And it has giants! Why we were like grasshoppers compared to them!"

This really upset the people! And they began crying out loud. They cried all night! Then the people began speaking against Moses and Aaron. They said, "We wish we'd died in Egypt! Or we

wish we'd died in this wilderness! Why has the Lord brought us here to be killed with swords? Wouldn't it be better if we went back to Egypt?!"

Then they began saying to each other, "Let's choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

Now, what were the children of Israel forgetting? Yes, they were forgetting about all of the miracles that the Lord had done for them. They were forgetting that the Lord had been with them all of that time in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They were forgetting that the Lord is the only God and that He is all powerful, that He can do anything. After all, what are giants to the Lord God? Nothing! And they were forgetting that the Lord always keeps His promises -- and He had promised this land to them. And since He had promised it to them, of course, they would be able to take the land!

Moses and his brother Aaron (the high priest) were very upset. And Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes to show that they were very upset, too. Joshua and Caleb spoke to the people saying, "The land that we went through is a very, very good land. If the Lord is happy with us, He will take us into this land and give it to us! It is a land flowing with milk and honey!"

Joshua and Caleb said to the people, "Just don't rebel against the Lord, and don't be afraid of the people in that land. They are nothing. Their defense is gone, and the Lord is with us! Don't be afraid of them!" Joshua and Caleb had faith in the Lord, didn't they?

But the children of Israel said, "Let's kill Joshua and Caleb!"

Well, what do you think happened then?! Why all of the people saw the glory of the Lord, a great shining light, in the Tabernacle! And the Lord said to Moses, "How long are these people going to provoke me?! How long will it be before they believe me because of all the miracles that I have shown among them?!"

The Lord was angry. But Moses talked with the Lord. And finally the Lord said, "I will pardon them. But because all of these men have seen my glory and have seen everything that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness and have many times tested me and haven't listened to what I say, because of all of that, they will not see the land which I promised to their ancestors. They will have to wander for 40 years in the wilderness, one year for each day that the land was looked at. Everyone who is 20 years old or older will die here in the wilderness."

The Lord told these disobedient grownup people, "You won't be able to go into this land, but I will take your children into it. Your children will know this good land that you didn't want."

Now Joshua and Caleb were way older than 20 years old. What about them? Well, then the Lord said, "But, my servants Caleb and Joshua have believed me and have followed me. They will be able to go into the land."

So, because the grownup people hadn't believed in the Lord, hadn't trusted Him, and wouldn't do what He said, all of the children of Israel had to turn back into the wilderness. And there they went from place to place for 40 years. During that 40 years all of the grownups died (except for Joshua and

Caleb, of course). This was very sad, but it was their own fault, wasn't it? Oh, and Moses hadn't died yet either.

Well, after the 40 years were over, the children of the disobedient grownups were all grown up themselves. And now it was just about time for them finally to enter the promised land of Canaan. The children of Israel were all camped near the Jordan River. And on the other side of the Jordan River was the promised land of Canaan!

Now, Moses was 120 years old! He was going to die very soon, and Aaron was already dead. Aaron's son Eleazar was now the high priest. But after Moses died, who would then be the human leader of the children of Israel? Well, of course, the Lord had a plan!

The Lord said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun and have him stand before Eleazar and before all of the people. He will be the new leader."

And Moses obeyed the Lord. Moses had Joshua stand up in front of Eleazar and all of the people. Then Moses put his hands on Joshua and said so that the people could hear him, "Joshua will be the new leader after I die."

Joshua had been faithful both to the Lord and to Moses and had served them for many years. He would be a good leader, wouldn't he?

Well then, very soon after this Moses died. And after Moses died, the Lord spoke to Joshua the son of Nun saying, "Moses my servant is dead. Now, therefore, get up, take all of the children of Israel, and cross the Jordan River into the land that I will give them. I have given you the whole land, everywhere that you are going to walk."

And the Lord said to Joshua, "I will be with you just like I was with Moses. So be strong and brave. Do everything that Moses told about in the law, the rules, that I gave him. Think about my law all of the time so that you don't forget it."

That must really have encouraged Joshua, that the Lord would be with him, mustn't it? So Joshua told the leaders of the people, "Tell everyone to get food ready, because in 3 days we're going to cross the Jordan and go take the land that the Lord our God has given us."

So three days later the Lord made a dry path through the Jordan River for them, and they all crossed the Jordan River into the land of Canaan. Then Joshua had 12 men, one from each tribe, pick up a big stone from the middle of the dry riverbed and take it across the river. And Joshua set the stones up as a marker, as a reminder for many years, to remind them that the Lord had dried the river up for them. And then after they were all across, then the Lord had the Jordan River start flowing again.

Four days later it was Passover time, so Joshua and the children of Israel celebrated Passover there in their new land. (I've told you about Passover before, that special time, haven't I?) And for Passover they ate food from the land of Canaan, and the Lord didn't send them manna anymore, because they didn't need it now. After all, they were no longer walking in a desert wilderness. No.

Now they were going to be living in a good land where they could settle down and grow lots of food.

And Joshua sent out 2 men to look over the city of Jericho, and Rahab helped these 2 men when the men of Jericho looked for them in order to kill them. A few days later the Lord had the walls of Jericho fall down, and Joshua and his army conquered Jericho. But Rahab and her family were safe, because she had believed the Lord and had helped the children of Israel. (Oh, and almost 1,500 years later Rahab became the ancestress of Jesus, didn't she?!)

Yes, Joshua led the people as the Lord began helping them conquer the land. And Joshua built an altar to the Lord, and Joshua read to all of the people the law that the Lord had given to Moses many years before.

Oh, and the men of one city in the land of Canaan (Gibeon) heard how the Lord was letting Joshua conquer the land, so these men played a trick on the Hebrews, and then they were able to stay in the land!

The kings of the land of Canaan gathered together to fight Joshua, but the Lord was helping the children of Israel, wasn't He? Yes, and the Lord told Joshua not to be afraid. And some of the bad people that the children of Israel conquered were the giants that the 10 spies had told the people about! After all, what do giants matter to the Lord God?!

In one battle the children of Israel were fighting, their enemies started running away, and the Lord sent a great hailstorm on their enemies, and the hail killed many of their enemies.

Now, I'm not sure if it were this same battle or another one, but during one battle Joshua asked the Lord to do something for him, and the Lord said He would. What did Joshua ask? Well, Joshua said loudly so that the children of Israel could hear him, "Sun and moon, stand still!" And the Lord made it so that the sun and moon stood still all day until Joshua had won the battle!! That's the only time that the Lord ever had the sun and moon stand still for a day! It never happened before that, and it never happened again!

After the land was conquered, it was divided among the 12 tribes of Israel.

Well, another time I told you more about things that happened as they took this good land that the Lord had given them. So I'm not going to tell them to you again here. You can hear about them in that other audio when I told you about the book of Joshua. It would make it way too long to go through all of that again!

Yes, Joshua faithfully led the children of Israel for many years. In fact, Joshua lived to be 110 years old! Just before Joshua died, he called the people together and told them again how good the Lord God had been to them. He even started by reminding them how the Lord had called Abraham and about Isaac and about Jacob, and how Jacob and his family had gone down into Egypt. He told them how the Lord had sent Moses and Aaron to Egypt and how when Pharaoh wouldn't let them all leave Egypt that the Lord had sent plagues onto Egypt. And then Joshua told them how the Lord had taken them out of their slavery in Egypt. And Joshua told the people how the Lord had protected and taken care of them in the wilderness.

Then Joshua told them to be very careful to obey the Lord's law and rules. He especially warned them not to have any idols nor false gods but only to worship the Lord, Who, of course, is the only God.

After telling the people all of that, then Joshua said to them, "Choose today whom you will serve. Will you serve the Lord God, or will you serve idols." Then Joshua said, "As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."

The people then answered Joshua and said, "Oh, we don't want to turn away from the Lord our God to serve false gods. Why, the Lord has given us this land. We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God."

That was very wise of the people, wasn't it? And Joshua wrote down the words they said. Then Joshua set up a big stone, and he said, "This stone is a witness to remind you of what you have promised, to serve only the Lord God."

And the people remembered their promise all the time that Joshua and the leaders with him were alive. But, very sadly, after Joshua died, sometimes they would forget and start serving false gods. But those are stories for other times! I've told those to you lots of times, haven't I? Yes, I told you about that when I talked about the book of Judges, and also when I talked about some of the judges (Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Samson). You can listen to those and hear many more exciting true stories.

Just one more thing, though. "Joshua" is a name in the Hebrew language. But do you know what the name "Joshua" means in English? It means "Jehovah saves". ("Jehovah" is the name of the Lord God.) And do you want to know something else? The New Testament wasn't written in the Hebrew language. It was written in the Greek language. And when the Greek New Testament wants to say "Jehovah Saves", instead of saying the Hebrew "Joshua", it says the Greek "Jesus"! "Jesus"! Yes, the Lord Jesus was named "Jehovah saves"! And Jesus not only is Jehovah, the Son of God, but Jesus does save, doesn't He?! Yes, Jesus saves us from our sins if we trust in Him, doesn't He? Remember, Jesus, the Son of God, loves us so very much that He came to earth as a human for the reason of saving us. And how did Jesus do that? Yes, by dying on the cross for our sins. But 3 days later Jesus was alive again, wasn't He? We say that Jesus conquered death. And someday Jesus is coming back again, isn't He? And if we have trusted in Him to save us, we will be with Him then, too.

I hope you enjoyed hearing about Joshua, the son of Nun -- a general, a servant of Moses, a good spy, and finally the leader of the children of Israel who led them into the promised land of Canaan.